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Objections to the 2014 Shoshone National Forest Land Management Plan Revision

Thomas Tidwell, Chief, USDA Forest Service  
Attn: EMC—Administrative Reviews  
1400 Independence Ave. SW  
Mailstop 1104  
Washington, D.C. 20250-1104

Dear Mr. Thomas Tidwell,

This letter is one more attempt to remind you of the greatest opportunity we have in our hands right now to make decisions that can sustain and improve the direction of land management in one of the most critical, wild, and special places in the world. Please consider this seriously.

**Objection 1:**

The proposed Forest Plan includes allowing mountain bikes on the Pinnacles/Kissinger Lakes trail in the DuNoir Special Management Unit. The Forest Service, through unclear and inconsistent management of the DuNoir SMU, has been at fault for letting any mountain bike activity occur in the DuNoir in the past. This allowance is not in accordance with the USFS mandate to manage the area as “de facto” wilderness to preserve its wilderness characteristics until the time Congress designates it as wilderness.

The 1972 Wyoming Wilderness Bill states for the DuNoir as Public Law 92-476: “Sec. 5 (a) Within the area depicted as the Special Management Unit [Dunoir] on the map referred to in sections 1 of this Act ...The Secretary shall administer said unit in accordance with the laws, rules, and regulations relating to the national forest especially to provide for nonvehicular access recreation and may construct such facilities and take such measures as are necessary for the health and safety of visitors and to protect the resources of said unit. Provided, however, that this section shall not affect such vehicular use...” (October 9, 1972) Non-vehicular means no bikes. Clear and simple.

And if the DuNoir SMU is to be managed as de facto wilderness in order that its wilderness characteristics remain intact for future possible designation as wilderness, then the DuNoir should be managed according to the Wilderness Act itself: “Sec. 2. (a) In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the

Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness. ... [T]here shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport..."

These statements are of great importance and relevance:

**...and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition...**

**... no other form of mechanical transport...**

Allowing mechanization, vehicular use, motorized equipment, any development, road expansion, etc. now would scratch away at the wilderness characteristics of the DuNoir, eliminating the possibility of it becoming wilderness in the future.

During my time working as a Wilderness Ranger for the Shoshone National Forest, I struggled to get clear direction from my superiors as to how we were supposed to manage on-the-ground situations in the DuNoir if we were to encounter a bike group. Were we supposed to fine them? Or just inform them they really shouldn't be there? Or let them ride, as the DuNoir was "only" a Special Management Unit, not yet designated wilderness? Nobody could give a clear answer because, at some upper level in the Forest Service management—where, I cannot know—the LAW was being ignored. The mistake happened at a higher management level, and trickled down to land-use managers and on-the-ground rangers, as we were left uninformed about how to manage the situation. This is why the Forest Service is at fault for allowing previous mountain bike use in the DuNoir, and it is no reason to decide to "continue" to allow mountain biking in the DuNoir, let alone to designate a trail specifically for mountain biking!

I know now that it was illegal to allow mountain biking in the DuNoir during past years, and this allowance has caused the sport to develop into a highly sought-after recreation activity guided by groups out of Jackson, written up in guide books, and posted on the internet ([www.scout.me](http://www.scout.me), [www.windriver.org](http://www.windriver.org)). We cannot say that it is okay to allow mountain bikes in the DuNoir simply because we have mistakenly allowed them in the past! That is the second step down a very slippery slope.

In previous comments on the Shoshone Forest Plan Revision, I wrote how "I support management for non-motorized and non-mechanized use of the DuNoir," and that "because it should be managed as de-facto wilderness until it is designated as wilderness so that its wilderness characteristics will not be lost in the interim, the means of access into the DuNoir should currently not allow motorized, mechanized, or vehicular use."

## **Objection 2:**

The proposed Forest Plan does not include additional wilderness areas. I strongly believe that this Forest Plan is a greatest opportunity to preserve the unique wilderness qualities that exist in the Shoshone.

The DuNoir, Wood River, Franc's Peak, and Trout Creek areas should be included for wilderness designation. Particularly, in relation to my previous objection, the DuNoir should be designated as wilderness now (after being recommended for wilderness three times) so that the management is no longer obscure. This would certainly and simply clear up any confusion on management and use in the

DuNoir. No more maybe's in response to what is allowed and not allowed in the DuNoir. And no more stalling its deserved wilderness designation.

In previous comments on the Forest Plan, I wrote extensively on the rationale and justifications that support the DuNoir becoming Wilderness. I stated that "the DuNoir has been found to possess wilderness characteristics as defined by the Wilderness Act, and such Special Management Unit areas are to be managed as wilderness until Congress passes a wilderness bill designating the area as wilderness." I brought up issues such as habitat continuity, migration corridors, road density over much of the surrounding land, and the high suitability of the DuNoir for wilderness.

### **Objection 3:**

I am concerned that the proposed Shoshone Forest Plan includes changes since the 1986 Plan that in fact may decrease the acreage of pristine wilderness management settings, especially in the Fitzpatrick Wilderness. I did not find a clear, detailed map and acreage of Pristine designation in the new proposed Plan. I am concerned because past Forest Service management in pristine areas, especially of the Fitzpatrick, has not upheld its pristine characteristics, again (as in the management of the DuNoir), allowing it to go down a slippery slope to where certain acres are now proposed to be managed as "primitive." This is my understanding, as I see in Table 22 in Wilderness Settings (p. 1125 of Appendix B, Final EIS Vol III). The table lists the current Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classifications, and desired ROS objective, and I see that the proposed objective or management direction for "any" current wilderness ROS area is "Primitive" with no listings for "Pristine." Furthermore, there are no acreage totals for pristine wilderness in Table 4 on page 8 of the Final EIS, Chapter 1. Why is this classification not listed with the other wilderness management settings? I would suggest making it easy to see and compare acreages of each setting, including Pristine.

Furthermore, being unable to see maps with detail, I am suspicious that, due to mapping errors since the 1986 Plan, certain acres of Pristine wilderness may be removed from the Fitzpatrick, where numbers of users and amount of use would have to be managed accordingly to continue to hold characteristics of Pristine wilderness, while a few scattered areas of Pristine acreage may have been added to random places like near Simpson Lake, where a management setting of Pristine would be obsolete. This would give the false impression that acreage of Pristine-managed wilderness is the same or even more than under the 1986 Plan.

I had commented on this subject previously, and received in response that there are standards and management guidelines in place for maintenance of wilderness character in both primitive and pristine settings. I still believe that the conditions in the Southern Fitzpatrick have been allowed by the Forest Service to decline below the standards of "Pristine," and this may be why new management by acre is not clearly expressed in the new proposed plan. Those areas of the Fitzpatrick should be maintained as Pristine, including restoring and rehabilitating any site that does not correspond to the Pristine characteristics, and/or restricting use in those areas, so as to not violate the wilderness non-degradation policy set forth in the area's original designation as Pristine. I also wrote a separate letter to Carrie Christman stating my concerns on the issue (27 May 2013).

I want to share a relevant story. While working as a Park Service employee in Grand Canyon National Park, I encountered along the trail a group of loud men, passing around a half-empty bottle of

liquor, and climbing, jumping, and scrambling beyond a signed-off area on the cliff side of the trail. I warned them, "Don't do anything irresponsible. A guy just died here the other day by falling...and you might kick loose rocks down on hikers below." I continued up the trail, and topped-out five minutes later. Looking back down to the precipice, I could see the group was still clambering around on the cliff, jumping across gaps, shouting and laughing, while taking each other's pictures. Either something valuable will be lost (a person's life), I thought, or the men will have to pay, or both. So I called dispatch, who sent two Law Enforcement Rangers to cite the men.

This story illustrates the point that when a dire situation is raised to the attention of the "right" people, they do not let it continue. In other words, in the case of the Shoshone Forest Plan, the public and others are aware of the serious issues on the Shoshone National Forest. The "right" people know. If the best decisions to protect the last wild places are not chosen, either something very valuable will be lost, or the decision-makers will have to pay, or both. You must see the correlation. The lax way that people handle some of these urgent and dire situations facing land management and wilderness today cannot continue.

I deeply appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Callie Domek